COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND RESOURCES

OPENING STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN DARRELL ISSA

Oversight Hearing:

"Hybrid Cars: Increasing Fuel Efficiency and Reducing Oil Dependence"
July 20, 2006

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to our Subcommittee hearing.

Today's record oil and gasoline prices underscore our country's need for more fuel efficient automobiles. We need to use fuel more efficiently to lessen our dependence on imported oil from unstable areas of the world. Almost 70 percent of the oil consumed in the U.S. is used by the transportation sector. Therefore, to improve this nation's energy security, it is vital to increase the fuel efficiency of the cars we drive.

One of the more practical solutions for the near-term is to increase the number of hybrid vehicles on the nation's roads. A hybrid is a vehicle that combines an electric motor and battery pack with an internal combustion engine to increase fuel efficiency over that of traditional vehicles.

Although it is recognized that these improvements have their limits, today we will explore these limits and how we can advance further. Is the recapture of kinetic energy in its infancy? Can we increase the efficiency of recapturing this energy into batteries or even capacitors? Additionally, hybrids have the reputation for super low emissions. Can we accomplish more?

Currently, hybrids are about 30 percent more fuel efficient than non-hybrid vehicles, so they burn less fuel and emit fewer pollutants per mile traveled than non-hybrid vehicles. Advances in hybrid technologies could potentially increase these benefits.

A complex series of factors influences an individual decision to purchase a hybrid vehicle, including the purchase cost, gasoline cost savings, government incentives, and personal convictions. As an owner of two hybrid vehicles, I am convinced of their benefits, but am also concerned about the low levels of market penetration that limit the overall impact of hybrids on the fuel efficiency of the U.S. fleet.

In an effort to better understand these competing factors, today's hearing on hybrid vehicles will focus on: potential fuel efficiency and environmental benefits, cost-effectiveness, market penetration, government incentives, U.S. manufacturing capacity, and anticipated advances in hybrid technology.

We are privileged to have here today:

Dr. Andrew Frank
Director, University of California-Davis Hybrid Electric Research Center

Mr. David Hermance
Executive Engineer, Toyota Motor North America

Mr. John German
Manager, Environmental and Energy Analyses, American Honda Motor Company; and

Don MacKenzie
Vehicles Engineer, Union of Concerned Scientists.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.